

The Chief and Her by CatsBalletHarveySpecter

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Angst, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Joyce B., Will B.

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-12-20 19:31:31

Updated: 2018-12-20 19:31:31

Packaged: 2019-12-12 23:17:43

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,053

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: El and Will are convinced Joyce and Hopper are meant to be more than friends, so they do something about it.

The Chief and Her

The chief and her, they've screwed before, huh?

Joyce Byers was nothing if not an independent woman. She had been taking care of herself and her boys for the better part of a decade, with no help from her dead-beat ex-husband. She prided herself on being able to do things on her own, but when Hopper started stopping by every Friday night with El to make the group dinner, she didn't protest. She liked not having to come home from work and cook, and the company wasn't so bad.

Hopper and El had been joining the Byer's for dinner every Friday for the past 5 months and it was El's favourite part of the week. She adored Joyce and often spent hours asking her questions about boys and makeup and school. El and Will had also become fast friends. After finally meeting officially the two bonded in a way the other members of the party didn't quite understand; they bonded over their time spent in the upside down, and no one really understood the other like they understood each other.

This Friday was no different than the other's before it, except El and Will had a plan. They noticed it a few months ago, the change in dynamic between Hopper and Joyce. It started with Joyce inviting the Hopper's to stay for a movie after dinner, then moved to lingering glances across the table and drinks and cigarettes on the porch as the sky grew darker and the kids got tired. Will was the first to notice, watching as his mom smiled as Hopper told her a story. He hadn't seen her smile so genuinely in a long time. Hopper began to spend more time at the house, coming up with excuses and things that needed to be fixed, just so he could spend more time with Joyce.

The Byer's boys didn't mind Hoppers presence at all. The meal he cooked on Friday night was always their favourite (Joyce wasn't much of a cook) and he always asked about their days and listened as Will went on about the latest campaign the party was doing, and he helped as best he could when Jonathon had questions about college applications. Both boys also appreciated the calmness that radiated from their mother whenever the chief was around; as if having him in the house would keep them all safe.

The more time Hopper and his adopted daughter spent with the Byers, the more the town talked. Joyce Byers already had a reputation for being out of her mind, so when the chief of police was often spotted coming or going from the Byers' residence, the rumor mill went wild. Joyce and Jim had quite the fling during their high school years, which left many of their old classmates to wonder if the love birds had rekindled their old flame. The other officers would sometimes whisper amongst one another when the chief left early every Friday to go to the Byers' for dinner, yet Joyce and Jim remained oblivious to the rumors surrounding their relationship. Sure, they were friendly, and sometimes flirty with each other, but they had been to hell and back together and that kind of experience really bonds two people. So Hopper continued to spend more time with the Byers, and the residents of Hawkins continued to speculate about the budding relationship between Jim Hopper and Joyce Byers.

A few weeks prior, after dinner Will mentioned it to El while they were colouring in his room.

"Do you think Hopper likes my mom?" he asks

"He loves her" El states matter-of-factly and proceeds to colour.

"What? He told you that?!" Will exclaims

"No, I can tell" she says

"How?" Will asks

"Because he always wants to come over. And he smiles all funny when I talk about her" she states

"She loves him too" she adds

"Why do you think that?" Will asks

"Because. She looks at him like I look at Mike and I love Mike" she hums, attention still on the picture in front of her.

Will stares at her dumb-founded. El may still be learning how the world works, but she may be on to something. The more he thinks about it, the more he agrees with what she thinks; Hopper and his

mom were in love with each other!

"We should help them" Will tells El

"Help them?" she inquires

"Ya, like help them realize they like each other! So they can be together"

"Be together?" she questions, not familiar with the term

"It's like dating" Will explains

"Okay yes we should help them" El agrees

"I have an idea..." Will begins as El leans in to listen intently.

Hopper joins them at the table, placing a lasagna in the centre and sending El a warning look to put the Eggo she was holding down. She sets it down on her plate and begins asking Jonathon about his camera as the group begins to eat. Joyce and Hopper find themselves chatting about her day at work when Will winks across the table at El and she pipes up.

"Dad?" she asks. She had only recently begun calling him dad and it melted his heart every time she said it.

"Yes?"

"What does in love mean?" she questions casually

"You know what love means" the chief responds

"But I mean IN love" she explains, "What's the difference?"

"Oh" Hopper blushes slightly, looking down at his plate to avoid making eye contact with Joyce, or anyone else at the table for that matter.

"Well you see love can mean lots of things. There are different kinds of love, there's platonic love and romantic love. Like I love you because we're family, but then there's romantic love which is

different, do you understand?"

"Like I love Mike?" she chimes

Hopper's face flushes at the thought of his teenage daughter being in love with a boy, even if he happened to not mind the Wheeler kid so much, he wasn't ready for her to grow up just yet.

"Ya kiddo, like that" he offers her a small smile and turns back to his dinner, taking a sip of his water before El pipes up again.

"Dad, have you ever been in love?" she asks rather innocently, causing Hopper to practically do a spit take with the water he just swallowed resulting in snickers from Will and Jonathon.

He pauses before deciding how to answer his daughters' question, still refusing to look up from his plate. When he finally does his eyes find Joyce's and she offers him a timid smile that tells him she's just as intrigued by his answer as El is.

"Ugh ya kid, I guess I have"

"How many times?" El prods, fully aware of how mad Hopper would be at her nosey-ness if she was trying to have this conversation without the presence of the Byers.

Hopper lets out a small breath and sighs as he answers, his eyes finding Joyce's tired pair from across the table as he answers, "Twice"

Joyce tilts her head at his response. She knew he must have loved Diane, they were married and had a child together, but looking back to their high school years Hop had never had a serious girlfriend, and she was positive he married Diane not long after he left Hawkins. Maybe there was someone before her? Or maybe... no she wouldn't even let herself think it, it was crazy, Hopper was never in love with her, they were just two kids who would fool around every so often.

She watches as he tries to piece together an answer that will satisfy his daughter. The pair had become incredibly close over the past few months and she'd be lying if she said she hadn't thought about the possibility of them being something more than friends. But she didn't let herself dwell on the thoughts, not for long. Though she was

beginning to mend the Bob sized whole in her heart, a part of her heart had always belonged to Hop, and on long nights when they stayed out smoking on the porch until dawn, she often found herself wondering if her relationship with Bob would have lasted. She was undeniably attracted to Jim Hopper, but she would never act on her feelings, it put too much at risk. El looked at her as a mother-figure and it would break her heart if things didn't work out between her and Hopper and El lost another person in her life. Besides, as blurry as the line between friendship and flirting had been between the pair, she was pretty sure Hopper didn't want more. He had his hands full looking after the town and raising a teenage daughter with powers, the last thing he needed to worry about was a relationship.

"With who?" El pushes once again

"Wow you are just full of questions tonight" he tries to play off the question, Joyce's stare trained on his as she waits for him to answer.

"Alright but no more questions, deal?" he bargains

"Deal" El smiles, proud of the work she'd done

"Well you remember me telling you stories about Sara? I was in love with her mom, which is why we got married" he answers

"But you said twice. That's two, right?" El asks, thinking maybe she misunderstood, some words still confused her.

"That's right sweetheart twice means two" Joyce interjects as Hop sends her a look; both grateful for her constantly helping to teach El with incredibly patience and annoyed that he now has to provide Eleven with a second name.

"And there was a girl in high school. She was probably the love of my life" he admits

He has the attention of all three kids now, none ever having seen the sensitive side of the chief and all equally intrigued by what he's saying.

"What was her name?" El questions, her and Will both seemingly unaware of their parent's previous relationship, Jonathon however

reading the room and starting to piece together what was being said.

"They sometimes called her Ruth" Jim smiles and watches as Joyce's tired smile reaches upwards towards her ears as she closes her eyes; clearing recalling their high school days. She remembers it like it was yesterday, sitting on the hood of Hopper's car, passing a cigarette back and forth while skipping 6th period. If only high school Jim and Joyce could see them now, sharing Friday night dinners as a weird, broken, sort of family-like unit.

"Hey mom that's so cool isn't your middle name Ruth?!" Will exclaims

"It is baby" she smiles at him before turning her attention back to Hopper, trying to read him as he holds her knowing gaze. Of course, he was talking about her. There wasn't a person on this earth that made him feel alive like Joyce Byers, then Horowitz, did. He blushes slightly at the notion, embarrassed to have admitted his past feelings for her in front of their children; even if their kids were none the wiser.

"Are you in love now?" El asks another question, breaking up the moment Joyce and Hopper were sharing

"I thought we agreed no more questions? And besides, who would I even be in love with?" Hopper jokes, messing up El's hair before returning to his meal.

El turns to face him and just moves her eyes to look at Joyce, then back to him before wiggling her eyebrows. He sends her a look as if to say, "Knock it off kid, not cool" and she takes the hint and returns to her dinner, leaving the rest to Will.

Will takes El's return to dinner as his cue and he begins.

"Mom, are you in love?" he asks

"What?" she answers, shell-shocked at her sons rather blunt question.

"Are you in love?" he repeats

Joyce blushes and doesn't attempt to hide her fluster as she scrambles to answer Will. "That's a complicated question hunny" she manages

"No it's not you either are or you aren't" Will concludes

The kid did have a point. You either were or you weren't in love and let's face it she was in love with the man sitting across from her, she was just scared to admit it. She loved the father figure he had become for the boys and the support system he had become for her. He was the first person she called with any news; good or bad, and she looked forward to their weekly family dinner. She knows she shouldn't say anything, that it would be for the better, but every fibre in her body is screaming at her, telling her this may be her only chance to put herself out there. So that's exactly what she decides to do.

"I am" she sighs, eyes slowly lifting until they lock onto Hopper's. A wave of sadness washes over him at the sound of her answer. She was in love and he had no shot. He knows they made it clear that they were only friends, but that line had been blurry to him for years; part of him always wanting more. It never crosses his mind that the person she's referring to being in love with might be him, so he drops her gaze and finishes his dinner, getting up to collect everyone's plates. Joyce gets up to help him in the kitchen and El turns to Will.

"Think that worked?" she asks

"Only time will tell" Will remarks as the pair make their way to Will's room.

In the kitchen Hopper washes the dishes in silence as Joyce cleans up the leftovers. He hasn't said anything about what she's implied and she's nervous. What if he really didn't feel the same way? Did she just ruin their long running friendship for no reason?

What she doesn't know is Hopper is trying to figure out who she could possibly be in love with? Was it the new guy who worked at the store? Or the school gym teacher? Jim only grew angrier and increasingly frustrated as he washed the dishes; the thought of her being with another man turning his stomach in knots.

She comes up behind him and places a hand gently on his forearm with a soft "Jim" and he pulls away slightly at her touch.

"I didn't know you were seeing someone" he mumbles, still facing away from her

"Seeing someone?" she questions, confused.

"It's just... never mind" he stutters and finally turns towards her

Her eyes plead with his to tell her what's on his mind and he concedes.

"It's just... I thought, don't we have something here?" he gestures awkwardly between them.

She chuckles under her breath and looks up at him.

"I hope so" she breaths with a tilt of her head.

"But you just said..."

"I'm in love with you, you idiot" she interrupts him, and his lips are on hers in an instant. He wraps his arms around her waist and pulls her flush to his body, deepening the kiss. He's wanted to kiss her like this for the past year, he wasn't about to let the opportunity slip away. She wraps her arms around his neck and rises on her toes as he deepens the kiss. He pulls back and releases her from his grip, and she rests her head against his chest. He places two fingers below her chin and tilts her head up towards his.

He whispers, "I love you too you know"

And with that he lips finds her again, only this time he picks her up and places her on the counter to help with the height difference. He kisses her harder as she whispers his name, both flashing back to their high school years and one of their steamy make out session beneath the bleachers. But this was different, he was older, more mature, he had more patience. He took his time with his kisses, each one lingering a little longer than the last. She appreciated the passion each kiss was fueled with, but she craved more each time his lips left hers. They get so caught up in their little moment they don't hear Jonathon come in to the kitchen with the rest of the dishes.

"Oh my god! Sorry!" he exclaims backing out of the kitchen, "Gross,

mom!"

Joyce breaks apart from Hopper and blushes, embarrassed to have been caught making out with the chief by her eldest son.

"What's gross?" Will asks Jonathon

"Mom kissing the chief in the kitchen" Jonathon exclaims

"Yes, we did it!" Will calls to El

"Did what?" the chief questions returning from the kitchen with some cookies

"Nothing" both kids cry in unison.

"Can they stay for a movie mom?" Will asks

Joyce raises an eyebrow at the Hop in question and he responds, "I can't see why not"

The group selects Back to the Future and settles in the living room, Joyce and Hopper on the couch and Will and El on the floor wrapped in a blanket. Jonathon comes out of his room and yells that he's going to Nancy's. On his way out the door he pauses to look at his mom and the chief, the chiefs arm around his mother along the back of the couch.

"So, are you two like, dating now?" he asks

"Goodnight Jonathon" Joyce calls in response, avoiding the question as she's not quite sure where they stand after their profession of feelings and post dinner make-out.

Joyce snuggles into Hoppers side as the movie plays and it does not go unnoticed by the kids who smile and giggle at their parent's sudden closeness.

The credits roll and Hopper peers down to see both kids fast asleep on the floor. He gestures towards the door and follows Joyce out onto the porch for a cigarette.

Joyce leans back against the wall as she takes a long drag. He's the first to break the silence that has crept in.

"What's on your mind Joyce?" he asks

"What are we doing" she sighs, exhaling her cigarette and closing her eyes

"Right now, enjoy this nice night and each other's company" he mutters

"You know what I mean Hop" she says, panic beginning to rise in her voice

"We have families to think about."

"Joyce..." he tries to interject

"I've got the boys and you have El who will be starting school soon, do we really having time to be messing around, figuring out whatever THIS (she gestures between them) is?" she rambles

"Joyce..." he tries a second time

"And what if whatever this is doesn't work out and we end up hating each other?! Our kids will never forgive us if we take away their Friday night routine" she proceeds to ramble in a panic

He cuts her off by kissing her. At first, she stands rooted in her spot but once she registers what's happening she begins to kiss him back. He pulls back and places both hands on her shoulders, steadying her.

"Joyce. I meant what I said, I love you" he exclaims

She pauses for a moment, letting her eyes fixate on him and let's out a small breath, "I love you too"

"Then I say we answer Jon's question with a yes and worry about the rest later" he grins

"Okay?"

"Okay" she agrees as he moves in to kiss her once more. His kisses become more intense and she pulls back resting her nose against his.

"Did you mean what you said about me being the love of your life in high school?" she whispers

"I still mean it" he responds gruffly

"Let's go inside" she says shivering against the brisk evening air, grabbing his hand and leading him to the door

"I should probably take El home" he says, smile dipping into a frown as the reality of parenthood hits him.

"Or you could both stay?" she asks hopefully

"Joyce Byers what are you implying?" he flirts, "Do you really think I'm the type of guy to put out on the first date?"

"Good thing we haven't been on a date yet" she teases as he follows her into the house.

The chief relocates Will and El to Will's room before heading to find Joyce. El mumbles something as he places her down on the bed, damn kids he thinks to himself, they set them up. He grins to himself as he goes to meet Joyce, he'll have to remember to thank them someday.

The next morning the kids wake up to the smell of pancakes and make their way to the kitchen to find Hopper trying to put pancake batter on Joyce's nose as she giggles. Hopper releases her when he hears the kids come in and greets them with a husky "goodmorning"

Will and El look from Hopper to Joyce and then back at each other. It wasn't the first time the Hopper's had spent the night, but something was different. Will noticed his mom wearing a smile bigger than he'd seen her wear in a long time and Hopper seemed slightly less grumpy than usual.

El, not nearly as observant as Will makes her way to the table and begins on the pancakes.

Joyce and Hopper decided it would be best to be honest with the kids about their relationship, though they weren't fond on going into sleepover details with El which is why they made sure to be awake before the kids.

"Hey El, I have an answer to your question from yesterday" Hop starts

"You asked if I was in love with anyone, remember?"

Her face lights up as she drops her fork and turns to give him her full attention, Will doing the same as they turn to face Joyce and Hopper who are standing near the stove.

Hopper puts his arm around Joyce's shoulder and continues, "We were wondering how you two would feel about me being in love with Joyce" he smiles at her

"YES!" El exclaims, running to hug Hopper.

Will looks at his mom, still considering what unanswered questions he wants to ask.

"Do you love him too mom?" Will asks and Joyce nods her head.

"We did it!" Will exclaims running to high five Eleven.

"What is that about?" Joyce asks Hop as their kids celebrate in the kitchen

"The baited us" he states

"What?" she asks, confused

"Yesterday with all the questions, they parent trapped us Joyce" he says sheepishly.

"We'll probably want to thank them one day" he says, wrapping his arms around her from behind and spinning her to face him for a sweet kiss. A kiss that does not go unnoticed by Eleven, who is ecstatic about her adopted father's new relationship. After some of the excitement wears off the group settles down to finish breakfast when the door opens, and Jonathon calls out,

"Mom, why is the chief's car still here?" as he walks into the kitchen and spots the foursome having breakfast.

"Oh, because he's still here" he answers his own question

Joyce looks from Jonathon to Hopper and blushes. Will and Eleven may still be kids but Jonathon wasn't naïve.

"So, you two are?" Jonathon starts and let's the question lingering without finishing it

"Is that alright with you?" Hopper asks

"I guess so" Jonathon mumbles

"But you better not hurt her, she's been through enough" Jonathon warns, his protectiveness of his mom suddenly kicking in.

"I wouldn't dream of it kid" he says, taking Joyce's hand under the table and sending it a small squeeze.

"Why don't you join us Jonathon?" Joyce asks, pointing to the chair next to her.

Jonathon takes a seat and begins to tell the chief about his newest photography project, while El rambles on about makeup with Joyce and Will joins in on both conversations here and there. Joyce gets up to fetch more juice and takes in the sight before her. Somehow Friday night dinners had turned into Saturday morning brunches (and would eventually become nightly dinners) with her little pieced together family and she can't help but smile at how far they'd all come. She returns to the table with the juice and Hopper leans over and whispers,

"Everything okay?"

"Never better" she smiles, pulling him in for a kiss.